

DR. JAGAN'S ADDRESS TO THE FOURTH COMMITTEE OF THE UNITED NATIONS, NEW YORK, 18 DECEMBER 1961

Madam Chairman,

I have come to address you in the name of the people of British Guiana. As you know, my party, the People's Progressive Party, won the elections in August 1961 and I was appointed Premier. I have come in the hope that you will be able in some way to assist in bringing about the immediate political independence of that colony. The right of peoples and nations to self determination and independence is an inalienable right, a right that must be enjoyed by all if mankind is to fulfil its humanity and all the peoples of the world are to truly reap the benefits of this great scientific era in peace.

Only independence, I humbly submit can give the necessary dynamism for rapid economic growth and development. Countries like Ghana, India, Israel, etc., have demonstrated how rapid progress can be after independence. Did not the distinguished Indian delegate, Mr. Sahni, recently tell the United Nations of India's rapid rate of progress in the decade after independence as compared with the fifty years before independence?

I have myself seen the rapid strides being made in Israel. Incidentally, the Mayor of Jerusalem told me that prior to independence, one high-ranking British adviser declared that so hopeless and bleak was the outlook of that country that it could not accommodate one additional cat! That country then had a population of about half a million, the same as ours; today it has over two million.

I had hoped that my recent trip to the United Kingdom to discuss this vital issue of my country's independence would have denied me this unique privilege of addressing this august Assembly. I am aware that I am speaking to those who have perhaps walked this very road beset with barriers and pitfalls, and because of your bitter experience, I feel confident that you will lend your invaluable aid to the cause of freedom and democracy for the Guianese people.

In no other civilization has there been greater extremes between the rich and those who have been condemned to poverty and backwardness. We live in a period unsurpassed in all human history for its abundance and scientific achievement. Yet the gap between the rich and poor countries is widening. The colonial-imperialist Powers, who have in the past repressed and still continue now to repress the legitimate aspirations of millions of people, are primarily responsible for this disgraceful injustice that threatens to rock the fabric of our civilization asunder. Consequently, it behoves all peace-loving nations to declare total war against any system which enslaves the colonial peoples. It is indeed the duty of colonial Powers to examine their consciences, to stop making excuses and grant immediate independence to the many peoples whom they now hold subject throughout the world.

I know that Africa has been a main preoccupation recently. Please permit me to bring to your attention the fact that in the Western Hemisphere there are yet colonial territories where over three million people still yearn for freedom.

Some people are obsessed with the fear of intervention by external Powers in the affairs of the American Republics. But they ignore the

three European countries which still subject people in this hemisphere to the degrading status of colonials.

The colonial Powers in their retreat boast about the number of persons to whom they have granted independence as if these people did not fight and suffer imprisonment and other rigorous treatment. Lord Dundee, speaking to the sixteenth plenary meeting of the General Assembly spoke of the "well-known" record of his country in following the principle of self-determination for the countries for which it was responsible. He further stated that it was proud that it had been able to help so many people in such a short time to enjoy self-government. I say to Lord Dundee in all seriousness, what then of British Guiana?

We have repeatedly been told that it is the declared policy of Her Majesty's Government to lead the colonial people to freedom and independence as soon as possible. The past decade has taught us that we cannot rely on those pious declarations, that British policy takes a zigzag course based not on altruism, not on high floral principles, but on self-interest and the protection of privileged positions of vested interests.

In 1953, British Guiana was granted what was then regarded as one of the most advanced constitutions in the British colonial empire. The major assumption by the constitution makers was that the democratic popular forces were too weak to be able to gain control of the Executive. This constitution was thus short-lived. After four and a half months in office, it was suspended. The strong, popularly elected government based on a united people was forcibly removed from office. We were victims of imperialism and the cold war, like the Gallegos Government of Venezuela, the Mossadegh Government of Iran and the Arbenz Government of Guatemala which were overthrown by force in 1948, 1951 and 1954, respectively. The usual campaign of slander and witch-hunt was unleashed against us. Incidentally, Madam Chairman, as Delegate to the last Conference of the Economic Commission for Latin America, I was pleased to see that the main recommendations for the economic well-being of Latin America recited the necessity of economic planning, for rapid industrialization, efficient agricultural development and land reform. These were deemed communist ten years ago when I advocated them.

Following the suspension of our constitution in 1953, there was imposed a Colonial Office dictatorial regime. Imprisonment, detention, restriction of the leaders of the national movement, victimization and terror became the order of the day. In 1957, elections were again held. But this was based on a constitution more retrograde than the one suspended in 1953. And constituencies were grossly gerrymandered. The Guianese people know all too bitterly that Britain's most precious commodity, democracy and democratic practices, are not for export.

Today British Guiana has internal self-government. But it is still a Crown colony. Britain can legislate by Order-in-Council and can at any time suspend the constitution. In many respects, we were better off constitutionally up to 1927. Under the then constitution handed over from the Dutch no such powers were conferred as are now in the hands of the British Government.

On Wednesday last, I spoke to Mr. Maulding, Secretary of State for the Colonies He categorically refused to fix 31 May 1962 or any other date for my country's independence. I may add, in parenthesis, that the 31 May 1962 date, the date fixed for the independence of the West Indies, was proposed by the main opposition party, the People's National Congress, during the election campaign. This date was supported by my party

which, together with the People's National Congress, polled 83 per cent of the votes at the recent elections.

Some may ask: Is British Guiana ready for independence? As far as we are concerned the only criterion is the passion of people to be free to pursue the way of life it feels will lead to its fulfilment of peace and contentment. We share the view of the United Nations that low standards and insufficient development should never serve as a pretext for the delay in granting independence.

At one time, the British Government referred to such yardsticks as size, population, literacy, economic viability, and the ability to stand on one's own feet and defend oneself.

British Guiana is about ten times as large as Israel., twice as big as Cuba and bigger than several other independent sovereign States. Its population of 560,000 is as large as that of Cyprus, larger than Iceland, and not too small compared with other independent nations. Its literacy rate is 82 percent. Political consciousness is laudably very high At the recent election almost 90 percent of the electorate cast their ballots without disorder.

What about economic viability? Though largely under-developed, British Guiana achieved over the last decade an economic growth rate of 6 per cent per annum. The latest estimate for 1960 is 6 percent. Its budget, though small, is balanced. Indeed, a small surplus is earmarked each year for our development plan.

The national income *per capita* is about US\$240, relatively higher than many under-developed countries..

As regards defence, we do not think it is sound or prudent to fritter away a large part of our limited financial resources in defence in these days of mass weapons of destruction like nuclear bombs and intercontinental missiles. We do not believe that the arms race is the way to international peace and security. We look to friendship with other countries and our membership in the United Nations offers us the collective security required to protect our national sovereignty.

These figures I have cited may be used to justify and to sing the praises of colonialism. Permit me to say that British Guiana, a country rich in natural resources is largely under-developed and there is wide-spread poverty. In addition, hunger and unemployment are prevalent on a wide scale.

What then is the reason for the United Kingdom Government's unrealistic and unprogressive attitude towards the wishes of the people whose wishes were freely expressed in three elections since 1953?

It is clear that the metropolitan Power does not agree with the openly demonstrated cause which the people have proclaimed on their banner the cause of freedom and the ending of colonialist-imperialist domination and exploitation. The response of the British Government to socialism at the ballot box in 1953 was force. Little wonder that the late Aneurin Bevan charged the British Government of giving the right to vote and then dishonouring the verdict of the electorate. Now the answer of colonialism seems to be to delay the granting of independence if the popular democratic forces with socialism as their ideology continue to win successive elections.

Madam Chairman, distinguished delegates, I must readily admit that I find great difficulty in reconciling the Colonial Office's action with the British Government's declarations and even more recently with the liberal sentiments expressed by President Kennedy in his interview with the editor of *Izvestia*. You will recall that President Kennedy stated that the United States Government would respect and have friendly relations with any government, even communist, which had been elected at free and fair elections. Did not President Kennedy signify his pleasure when he said that even though Marxist, I had won my position at fair elections.

Why then. I ask, the procrastination about our independence?

Our patience is at the point of exhaustion. Only the armed might of the British Government is acting as a deterrent to my people from declaring themselves an independent State with its full obligations and responsibilities to the world community.

But I am not without hope in this honourable struggle to free my people from the chains of colonial bondage. My hope now largely resides in General Assembly resolutions 1514 (xv) of 14 December 1960, and in resolution 1654 (xvi) of 27 November 1961, which clearly establishes a seventeen-man committee to make recommendations on implementing the 1960 Declaration on colonialism. I am also heartened by the authorization of this committee to meet outside of the United Nations Headquarters whenever and wherever such meetings may be requested for the effective discharge of its functions in consultation with the appropriate authorities. I take this opportunity now, Madam Chairman, in requesting through your Committee, the Special Committee of the seventeen, to visit British Guiana as soon as possible to examine the situation there. I shall also call upon the United Kingdom Government to give full support and co-operation in the Committee's task to bring about an early settlement for a date for British Guiana's independence.

The Fourth Committee has rendered invaluable services to dependent and non-self-governing territories in the past. I am told that not too long ago the United Kingdom Government had opposed

in the Trusteeship Council, the setting of a target date for Tanganyika's independence as unrealistic. Now, Tanganyika is a fully independent and sovereign State. This is due no doubt to the valiant efforts of the Fourth Committee's consistent work in liquidating the vestiges of colonialism. I would wish that in the near future this Committee's work will come to an end and it will disappear as such and release its energies to other tasks that await solutions in the United Nations Organisation.

In conclusion, I want to express my deep and sincere thanks to you, Madam Chairman, and the distinguished members of your hard-working Committee, for granting me the privilege at such short notice to address you here today. I also wish to express thanks on behalf of the people of Guiana for affording me this hearing.

Thank you.

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The following is a piece from 1961 paying tribute to Dr. Jagan as a "Petitioner for Freedom". This editorial was written shortly after Dr. Jagan addressed the Decolonisation Committee of the United Nations in November 1961 where he made a strong call for independence for Guyana.

When the history of the twentieth century and the fight against colonialism, for peace and socialism comes to be compiled, the name of Cheddi Jagan will be found among the few who could be described as the most indefatigable and the most unyielding fighters.

Over the past three months in particular, Dr. Jagan's activity has done much to light a candle in the darkness and ignorance and has substantially changed the course of events in the battle for freedom and socialism. During his visit to the United States of America a month or so ago, in the face of reaction in this greatest of all imperialist strongholds, Jagan reaffirmed his faith in socialism and the right of people to choose whatever government they wish. As a direct result of his activities in the United States, President John Kennedy in one of the most important press interviews that he is ever likely to hold in his lifetime - we refer to the interview with the correspondent of Izvestia - said that irrespective of what Jagan was, even if he was a communist, he had been elected by free ballot and deserved respect and assistance from the United States and other countries. Who could detract from the significance of this statement, who could detract from the brilliance of this outstanding achievement on the part of the Premier of a country with a handful of people without arms without forces, without power to threaten anyone?

This statement of policy by the President of the United States will go a far way in assuring people all over the world of the recognition of the right to choose whomsoever they wish to lead them in free elections.

The other aspect that we would like to refer to is the significance of being able to address the United Nations Trusteeship Committee and to lift his voice in freedom even when he did it as he preferred to appear as a "Petitioner for Freedom".

Indeed, the British imperial government's representative attempted to prevent Jagan from speaking. And in this he was assisted by certain other imperial interests who are today joining in the destruction of the rights of the Congolese people and against India in her last minute decision to put an end to imperialist enclaves in her territory.

The Guianese people and the other peoples still under colonial rule, owe a debt of gratitude to this son of Guiana who in his own land is abused by interests who dominated this country before, and other stooges who secured decorations for their support of reaction. British Guiana has suffered much because of her fight for freedom and though Guiana is not a free and independent country, the territories of Africa and Asia who have become free have benefited greatly from the struggle for freedom, for peace and for socialism put up by British Guianese under the leadership of Cheddi Jagan.

We look forward to celebrating independence of Guiana in 1962 even if the British do not now agree. Guianese people in this last ditch struggle will have to be firm and unyielding in their determination but they have one consolation - that at the head of this struggle for freedom there is an unyielding leader, one who will not swerve one-thousandth of an inch in his determination to free Guiana and to fight for socialism and peace not only in Guiana but for the whole world.